

Naval Auxiliary Air Station, San Clemente Island by M.L. Shettle, Jr.

San Clemente Island, located 75 miles west of San Diego, is 25 miles long and two to five miles wide. The 56 sq. mi. island received its present name when sighted by the Spanish explorer Vizcaino on November 25, 1602, Saint Clement's Day. During the 1800s and the early 1900s, the island, used for sheep grazing, was also frequented by fisherman and smugglers. San Clemente, under the jurisdiction of the Navy, had a fleet training facility at Wilson Cove. A small crushed rock and shell air strip, built in 1933, was also used by the Marines. These two facilities were connected by a six-mile macadam road. In late 1938, a project began to improve the existing airfield. The WPA and a civilian contractor built a 3000-ft. and a 2000-ft. runway plus a hangar. The runways were available for use in December 1939. The remainder of the project reached completion in July 1941.

In January 1942, a Marine scouting squadron with 19 Vought SB2U Vindicators and one J2F Grumman Duck operated from the airfield. The next month another project commenced to extend the runways and make additional improvements. In March, a 200-man Army detachment set up two radar stations on the island. Two months later, the Marines returned for flight operations with the establishment of an antiaircraft machine gun training unit. The Marines utilized J2F Ducks for target towing.

In February 1943, the Navy commissioned NAAF San Clemente Island. The location was evaluated for blimp operations and deemed, at that time, to be unsuitable due to strong and unpredictable winds. In March, the Bureau of Ordnance came to the station for a two month period to test 1600-lb. bombs. VJ-7 supported the project with two PBY-5As. In July, the Navy formed a Combat Information Center (CIC) - Team Training Unit. The unit's syllabus consisted of a three-week course training 589 officers and 1914 men during its existence. The next month, this unit trained the first of seven ARGUS units. ARGUS was a shore-based radar unit that provided the CIC mission for island bases. Airborne radar targets for training were provided by VJ-7 with two PBY-5As and 12 SBDs.

In January 1944, Seabees built two permanent radar installations on the island. The next month, the Navy upgraded San Clemente to an NAAS. Beginning in April, fighter components of VC squadrons started using the station for gunnery training. A total of 10 groups of 10 to 15 FM-2s, supported by San Diego's CASU 5, trained at the base during 1944. In June, the Navy established a Special Projects School for Air that taught radio and radar countermeasures. The School utilized 15 SNBs and trained 44 teams during the war.

In early 1945, the Navy rebuilt the runways. On April 15, an Airborne Early Warning Training Unit began operations from the station. In June, this unit operated one SNJ, three TBM-3Es, and nine TBM 3Ws. Also that month, LTA began operations at San Clemente, as blimps from Santa Ana and Del Mar averaged three landings a week.

San Clemente, had three asphalt runways -- the longest 5,000 ft. On the northern tip of the island was Castle Field, a dirt strip used for emergencies. In March 1944, station personnel numbered 117 officers and 749 men with barracks for 100 officers and 600 men. The station usually had a J2F Duck, but in mid-1944 also had a GH ambulance plane.

Following the war, San Clemente became an ALF to San Diego and remains so to this day. The Navy has since abandoned the WW II station site and built an 8,000-ft. runway at the former Castle Field. In 1961, the Navy named the facility Frederick Sherman Field in honor of the three-time winner of the Navy Cross and carrier task group commander during World War II.

Copied with the permission of the author from [United States Naval Air Stations of World War II](#).

San Clemente Island Range Complex by globalsecurity.com

The San Clemente Island Range Complex (SCIRC) consists of San Clemente Island (SCI) land, air and sea training ranges and designated operational areas to the south and west of SCI which are controlled by a single command and control system on SCI. The range and operations area on San Clemente Island is owned entirely by the Navy and accommodates naval surface fire support, air-to-ground ordnance delivery operations, and special operations. Its location near San Diego is critical for efficient use of training dollars.

The San Clemente Island is the only surface fire support range on the West Coast. And with the planned closing in 2003 of the bombing range at Vieques, San Clemente Island will become the Navy's last ship-to-shore live-fire range. Training on the island has increased 25% since the terrorist attacks of September 2001. The Department of Defense began construction in July 2002 of a \$21-million simulated US embassy compound to train troops in rescuing Americans.

San Clemente Island (SCI) is the southernmost of the eight California Channel Islands. It lies 55 nautical miles (nm) south of Long Beach and 68 nm west of San Diego. The island is approximately 21 nm long and is 4-1/2 nm across at its widest point. Since 1934, the island has been owned and operated by various naval commands. More than a dozen range and operational areas are clustered within a 60 mile radius of the island. The Commander-in-Chief, Naval Forces, Pacific (CINCPACFLT) is the major claimant for the island, and Naval Air Station, North Island (NASNI) is responsible for its administration.

The San Clemente Island Range Complex (SCIRC) is the cornerstone of the tactical training ranges supporting the Southern California Operations Area (SOCAL OPAREA). SOCAL supports the largest concentration of naval forces in the world. The SCI land, air, and sea ranges provide the U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, and other military services space and facilities which they use to conduct readiness training and test and evaluation activities. SCI's distance from the mainland and its complete Navy ownership make the island and its surrounding area ideal for fleet training, weapon and electronics system testing, and research and development activities.

This integrated set of ranges and operational areas covers approximately 2,620 square nautical miles (nm) and is located 68 nm west of San Diego. The command and control system and supporting infrastructure emanate from SCI which is approximately 21 nm (39 km) long and 4 and one-half nm (8.3 km) at its widest point. The SCIRC consists of more than six dozen ranges and operational areas. The extent of these areas range from the ocean floor to an altitude of 80,000 feet.

San Clemente Island has been operated by Navy as a tactical training range and testing area for over 70 years. Tactical training ranges and operational areas provide space and facilities where U.S. military forces can conduct exercises in a safe, controlled environment. The SCIRC is the cornerstone of tactical training in the Southern California region. The primary purpose of the Complex is to provide readiness training for units and personnel who deploy overseas to meet the national strategy of forward presence and global engagement. Among the evolving needs that precipitated the proposed action are the need for more training in: littoral warfare, including mine counter-measures; electronic warfare; missile firing; operations in the shore bombardment area (SHOBA), amphibious operations; and Naval Special Warfare. Increased need for test and evaluation activities is also anticipated.

The island's military value had for a number of years been recognized by the Navy. They made plans to establish a fighter-aircraft training base and, after the Blair and Murphy sheep ranching lease expired, began construction. In 1935 the Navy moved civilian workmen out to the prospective naval base to build barracks, roads, and a pier at Wilson Cove. Following commencement of WWII hostilities, the Navy in 1942, accelerated use of the Shore Bombardment Area (SHOBA) at the southern end of the island for fleet training. In 1949 Naval Ordnance Test Station (NOTS), China Lake, began using the island as a test and evaluation range on an occasional basis.

San Clemente Island is home to the San Clemente Island Loggerhead Shrike, which is listed as an endangered species pursuant to the Endangered Species Act. Due in part to successful conservation efforts, the population has grown from 13 to 42 birds in the wild and 64 birds in a captive breeding population at a cost of \$2.5 million annually. The Navy's successful stewardship of the Loggerhead Shrike has had a direct impact on training. To protect the Shrike from fires during the seven-month fire season and to comply with the Endangered Species Act, the Navy has decreased one live round impact area by 90 percent and another by 67 percent, reducing the types of missions for which forces can train. The Navy has also eliminated use of illumination rounds and all surface fire support training at night. Moreover, during Shrike breeding season, the shore bombardment range is closed four days a week to permit biologists to surveil the Shrike. As the Shrike population recovers, nesting areas are expanding into the only two fire-impact areas.

To reduce the use of diesel fuel and prevent harmful emissions, the Naval facility on San Clemente Island installed three 225-kilowatt wind turbines. From February 1998 to April 2000, the turbines produced two million kWhs, approximately 13 percent of the island's total electricity needs. In FY99, the turbines helped the installation decrease

consumption of 141,757 gallons of No. 2 diesel fuel, and avoided 18,450 pounds of carbon monoxide emissions. In the future, the turbines should provide 15 percent or more of the island's electricity, further reducing diesel fuel use and emissions.

San Clemente Island and the waters surrounding the island are used and visited by a variety of organizations, including military, civilian government, contractors, environmentalists, civic organizations, fishing vessels, pleasure craft, and others.

Air Resorts has two contracts with the U.S. Navy: F11626-93-D-0032 and F11626-94-D-0018. Under one contract, Air Resorts has operated the non-TCAS equipped CV-440 aircraft from Pt. Mugu Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS), California to San Nicholas Island Navy Outlying Field (NOLF), California. On the other contract, the aircraft have operated from North Island Naval Air Station (NAS), California to San Clemente Island Naval Auxiliary Landing Field (NALF), California. The usual alternate for the San Nicholas route is Pt. Mugu, and for San Clemente, it is Navy North Island.

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NAAS San Clemente Island by Paul Freeman

The first airstrip on San Clemente Island was located in the center of the island. Its date of construction is unknown. The earliest reference to the airfield which has been located is The Airport Directory Company's 1937 Airports Directory (courtesy of Bob Rambo). It described "San Clemente Island Aux" as having two 1,600' "sandy loam" runways.

A program to improve the airfield was begun in 1938. The Works Progress Administration & a contractor built two runways (3,000' & 2,000') and a hangar. The construction was completed by 1941.

With the outbreak of WW2, a Marine scouting squadron began operating from the airfield in 1942 with 19 Vought SB2U Vindicators & a single Grumman J2F Duck. That same year another construction project commenced to extend the runways, and an Army detachment activated two radar stations on the island. The airfield was commissioned as Naval Auxiliary Air Facility San Clemente Island in 1943.

The station was evaluated for blimp operations but was deemed unsuitable due to the island's strong & unpredictable winds. It was used for bomb testing, radar training, fighter gunnery training, and electronic countermeasures.

In 1945, in spite of the previous negative evaluation for blimp suitability, blimps from Santa Ana & Del Mar began averaging three landings at San Clemente per week.

The WW2-era airfield eventually had three paved runways (the longest was 5,000'), and a concrete ramp south of the runways. A hangar was located on the ramp, with several buildings to the south. The 1945 Mojave AAF Chart (courtesy of Chris Kennedy) depicted San Clemente as having a control tower.

"San Clemente OLF (Navy)" was depicted on the 1953 San Diego-San Francisco Flight Chart (courtesy of Scott O'Donnell), which described the field as having a 5,000' hard-surfaced runway. "San Clemente OLF" was listed among active airfields in the "Aerodromes" table on the 1955 San Diego Sectional Aeronautical Chart (courtesy of John Voss). It described the field as having three "oil seal treated" runways (the longest being 5,000'). Strangely, although this airfield was included in the table of active airfields, "San Clemente OLF" was listed among active airfields in the "Aerodromes" table on the 1955 San Diego Sectional Aeronautical Chart (courtesy of John Voss). It described the field as having three "oil seal treated" runways (the longest being 5,000'). Strangely, although this airfield was included in the table of active airfields, the remarks say simply, "Closed".

In 1961, the original airfield was replaced with the construction of the much larger San Clemente Naval Auxiliary Landing Field on the northern end of the island. A preliminary study was carried out in the same year by the Naval Ordnance Test Station, China Lake, for a major renovation of the old landing field. This study included renovation and/or enlargement of a number of the berthing, messing, administrative, utility, and aircraft support facilities. Apparently this was never done, and the old airfield remained inactive.

In 1971, a civilian group headed by Congressman Anderson and the Marine Parks and Harbor Association attempted to obtain civilian yachting access to Pyramid Cove. This group suggested that the Navy could move their bombardment range to San Nicolas Island. It also recommended that the old airfield could be renovated for civilian aircraft use, while possibly including a restaurant at the terminal. This attempt was unsuccessful.

Fleet Composite Squadron 3 inaugurated their new island operations and support facilities in 1971. VC-3 launched jet target drones for surface ship target practice from the old deactivated airfield. VC-3 has since been deactivated, and it is not known if the old airfield is still used for any drone operations, or anything else.

The remains of the airfield consists of three paved runways (the longest is 5,200'), and a concrete ramp south of the runways. The primary runway is in better shape than the smaller runways, which are barely perceptible. The foundations of former buildings are apparent on & around the ramp, along with some small buildings which remain standing.

Only a single runway (the east/west runway) is depicted on the 1977 USGS topo map, labeled "Landing Strip". The airfield is not depicted at all (even as an abandoned airfield) on 2002 aeronautical charts.

Extracted from [Abandoned and Little Known Airfields](#)

NALF San Clemente Island by Paul Freeman

This Naval Auxiliary Landing Field is located on an uninhabited island off the coast of Los Angeles.

It originally existed as Castle Field, a World War II-era dirt strip used for emergencies. The 1948 San Diego Sectional Chart (courtesy of Chris Kennedy) described "Castle (Navy)" as having a 2,000' unpaved runway.

The new paved runway was built in 1961 to replace the old San Clemente airfield in the center of the island. The new airstrip & support facilities were built on the northern end of the island. This new \$14 million air facility was originally built for the Regulus II missile operations, but was curtailed when that program was canceled.

In 1971, carrier deck lighting was installed at the airfield, which greatly increased the importance & utilization of the field. Since then, Navy & Marine Corps squadrons have used the island to practice carrier landings. Navy, Marine and Air Force planes also conduct ground control approach & normal landing training.

The airspace over the island is contained within a Warning Area.

The airfield at San Clemente consists of a single concrete runway (5/23, 9,300' long), a parallel taxiway, concrete ramp and a part-time control tower.

Extracted from [Abandoned and Little Known Airfields](#)

San Clemente Island Naval Ocean System Center Facility (2005) by Justin Rughe

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